

a voice to advocate for their needs at the convention.<sup>59</sup>

As white men secured pardons and prepared for the constitutional convention, African Americans prepared for their own convention to be held in Raleigh at the same time. Leading the call for a “Freedman’s Convention” were some of the state’s first black leaders, drawn mainly from former slaves who had escaped northward before the war. The convention, which met in Raleigh in September 1865 at the African Methodist Church, drew approximately 120 men from forty counties. Far from a homogeneous group, the representatives came from various backgrounds. Some, such as Wilmington’s John P. Sampson, were well-educated and financially secure whereas others were poor and illiterate. United by a common cause—the overall betterment of their race—the men met to discuss ways to achieve, as stated by convention president the Reverend James Walker Hood, “equal rights before the law.” Most of the convention’s resolutions

focused on legal provisions to protect of black welfare in the courts, labor contracts and education and, to a lesser degree, suffrage rights. The resolutions were couched in deferential language designed not to intimidate. The white men writing the new constitution paid little heed to their content and completely disregarded the resolutions. The end result of the Freedman’s Convention was the creation of a statewide organizational network of black leaders who would lay the groundwork for future political struggles.<sup>60</sup>



John P. Sampson

Image: Eric Foner, *Freedom’s Lawmakers*.

<sup>59</sup> Zuber, *North Carolina During Reconstruction*, 4. Once the delegation met in Raleigh, it was expected to repeal the secession ordinance of 1861, remove laws protecting slavery in order to abolish the institution, ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, and repudiate, or cancel, the state’s debts related to the Confederate war effort. Additionally, the convention was expected to plan for regular statewide elections for governor and representatives at the state and national levels. The Thirteenth Amendment passed by Congress in January 1865, abolished slavery in states that were still members of the United States. Re-entry into the Union by southern states was contingent, among other things, on ratification of the amendment. New Hanover’s delegates to the convention were Hanson F. Murphy and William Wright. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 66-67, 199; John L. Cheney, Jr., ed., *North Carolina Government, 1585-1979: A Narrative and Statistical History* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State, 1981), 832; Hamilton, *Reconstruction*, 109, 111.

<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, *Reconstruction*, 150; Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails*, 86-94, 110-112; For the quotation from Rev. James W. Hood and more on the convention, see Roberta Sue Alexander, *North Carolina Faces the Freedmen: Race Relations During Presidential Reconstruction, 1865-1867*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 17 -31; David Cecelski, “Abraham Galloway: Wilmington’s Lost Prophet and the Rise of Black Radicalism in the American South” *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 56.